

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – July 12, 2007

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Tom Dingwall, Vice Chair
Linda Fulkerson
Gary Fredricks
Tom Heaney
Bill Lunsford
Larry McKim
Phillip Quochoyewa
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Gregg Maxon, Director - ASVH
Mike Klier, Deputy Director
Angela Shinn, Assist Deputy Director
Dave Hampton, Public Affairs Officer
Lee Borgen, Vets' Benefit Counselor
Mona Engler, Native American Vet Coordinator
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner

Opening –The two new Commissioners introduced themselves, along with the rest of the Commissioners who indicated their interest in serving as either the Chairman or a Vice Chair. Chairman Ellis introduced the guests, which included Noel Benois, Robert “Bo” Bohack, and Bobby Boyd.

Election of Officers –Tom Dingwall was elected to serve as the New Chairman by acclamation. Vice Chair Ken Yamanouchi was then elected. Chairman Dingwall accepted responsibility for the meeting at that time.

Minutes –The minutes of the June 14, 2007 meeting were approved as distributed.

Correspondence Sent and Received – A letter of welcome was sent to William Lunsford, similar to the one sent to newly appointed Commissioner Larry McKim. A letter was sent to Director Donald Moore, VA Medical Center Director regarding issues raised in the June 14 meeting by Steven J. White, Sr. A letter was sent to Bill Sahn as a follow up to questions about the VA Medical Center raised in the April 14 meeting in Payson. There were a total of 135 pieces of mail sent this month, the majority of which were invitations to the August 4, 2007 meeting. Additionally, there was a letter of appreciation for Gabe Forsberg's service from the by outgoing Chairman, Webb Ellis.

Director's Report – Mike Klier, Deputy Director, indicated that R. Gregg Maxon, Acting Director for the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services would join the meeting as soon as possible. He covered the following:

- Chandler Veterans Service Division Office has opened
- He has been working with Maricopa County to partner with ADVS, offering a space for a Veterans Benefits Counselor (VBC) in a new “One Stop” opening on the west side of the metropolitan Phoenix area.
- Every effort has been made to place VBCs to within a 1 to 1.5 hour drive of veterans statewide. There are significant challenges to serving the Native American veterans in the most rural areas, but every effort is being made to keep to the one hour travel time for veterans.

- As new VBCs are being hired, their training has been enhanced and they are then assigned to a seasoned VBC who will serve as a mentor.
 - He will send Tom Heaney, Larry McKim, and Tom Dingwall copies of the VBC training manual.
- A VBC will be working in Bullhead City in the near future.
- There are approximately 21 VBC vacancies at this time, 19 of which were opened up on 7/1/07 (the beginning of the state's fiscal year).
- Freedom license plate purchases have been growing steadily.
- Harkins Theatres will promote the Freedom plate on 100 screens for a minimal cost from September 27 through October 28.
- Dept. of Corrections is beginning to work with ADVS regarding claims for its veteran employees and inmates.
- U.S. Vets (a transitional housing organization to support veterans) is working with ADVS to ensure that their veterans receive all of the benefits due them, especially education and training benefits.
- The Cavalry Soldier Relocation Project is underway. Commissioner McKim is on the subcommittee of the Southern Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemetery (SAVMC) Foundation that will be in charge of coordinating the re-interment of the soldiers whose bodies are being moved from the Tucson construction site to the SAVMC.

Chairman Dingwall asked the status of a report provided by Mike Fugate, State Approving Agency (Education), regarding ADVS being forbidden to inform Arizona veterans of their rights to receive educational counseling. Dep. Director Klier will report to the Commission at the September meeting.

Gregg Maxon, Acting Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services reported on the focus of the agency at this time. He has been serving as the Acting Director for the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services since March and wanted to provide a few additional details beyond Deputy Director Klier's report:

- Until recently, the Arizona State Veteran Home has been the most pressing concern because of survey results from the VA and the Department of Health Service. All compliance issues have been resolved.
- Greg Sulzer has been hired to head up the Fiduciary Division, another area where critical services are provided.
- The biggest problem with the agency now is that there is no focused strategic plan. Agency management needs to clearly identify its mission and objectives. One example provided was the need to influence the VA's priority on building the state veteran home in Tucson. We are now 3 to 4 years out on the VA's priority list to build the Tucson Home. The Tucson VAMC is one of the poly-trauma centers that will focus on traumatic brain injuries and the new home may play an important role for vets who require long-term care near the VA. The funds for the Tucson Home are slated to expire this year, so ADVS needs to push for a change.

Chairman Dingwall offered Director Maxon the Commissioners' support, offering to assist with any letter writing campaigns or contacting US Congressional delegates.

Gen. Maxon has asked Dave Hampton, Public Affairs Officer, to increase communications with veterans. The agency still has an identify problem and nobody knows the difference between ADVS and the VA. He is also committed to developing a stronger relationship with veterans service organizations in the state.

There has never been a budget for the Advisory Commission. Webb Ellis made a motion that the Chair, Vice Chair, and Strategic Planner meet with the Director to discuss a proposed budget and other issues. It carried unanimously.

Tom Heaney worked with Stella Cook to schedule the Governor's attendance at the December 7th observation of Pearl Harbor at either the Visitors' Center in Hawaii or an event in Tucson. Commissioner Heaney invited Gen. Maxon to the Tucson event.

Region 1 Meeting in Prescott – Gary Fredricks said that he needed to change the date of the event because of the difficulty in identifying a meeting location. The August meeting will be held on the 4th of August. The meeting must be concluded by noon and he mentioned the local tribes were invited. A news release was sent to the local media. Ken Yamanouchi and Commissioner Fredricks also plan to contact the invitees by telephone as a follow up.

Vice Chair Yamanouchi felt that the Advisory Commission needed to extend a specific invitation to meet with the Native American tribes on the Friday evening before the regional meetings. Linda Fulkerson asked Mona Engler to assist in contacting tribes in Region 4 for the November 4th meeting.

Noel Benois offered assistance. He believed that travel was the biggest obstacle. Linda Fulkerson said that there have been attempts to meet on the reservations. Mr. Benois said that there is still travel required, but it is the cost associated with travel is a problem. Commissioner Quochytewa said that there may be an opportunity to hold a meeting for all tribes with the annual event held at Piastewa Peak on the 3rd week every April. He suggested that the Advisory Commissioners participate in some capacity. Ernest Martinez is also a co-sponsor and he focuses on bringing in the Latino veteran community. Commissioner Quochytewa asked to meet with Noel Benoit and Mona Engler at the conclusion of the Commission meeting.

Commissioner Heaney asked if there were some resource available to deal with concerns about travel expenses for the American Indian veterans. Gen. Maxon said he believed that this would be a legitimate use for the Veterans Donation Fund for purposes of reimbursing travel expenses.

Region Assignments for Commissioners – Commissioner McKim will assume the vacancy created when Commissioner Dingwall became Chairman. Commissioner Ellis will remain with Region 2 and Commissioner Lunsford will take Region 4.

Meeting Calendar for 2007/2008 – The Region 4 meeting will need to be changed to November 3, 2007 and the meeting will be held in Lake Havasu City.

Veterans Research Council –The council was formed to do more in-depth analysis of issues raised by the Veterans Task Force and included in its January 2006 recommendations to the Governor. Webb Ellis reported that the VRC is primarily made up of the state commanders of the largest veteran service organizations. There are also VRC committees that deal with special populations (such as homeless, female, and rural veterans). By August 15, the VRC must submit any proposed legislative changes and identify funds required to support the Council.

Commissioner Fulkerson has been working on tax incentives for low-income and transitional housing for homeless veterans. She suggests that there may be grant opportunities for rural areas to create a program based on the Camp Alpha program. This is a completely self-contained program to offer medical, employment, educational, housing services. The land has been selected and there are products that can provide a means to build homes. Others on the Homeless Committee are Bob DiGiralamo, Bill Messer, Doug Mitchell (VAMC), Linda Fulkerson, and Brad Bridwell.

Vice Chair Yamanouchi asked about the status of his letter of appointment and Gabe Forsberg said that she would get back to him.

Arizona Democratic Veterans' Caucus – Commissioner Ellis was cautious about participating in a partisan event because there had been claims in the past that the Advisory Commissioners were endorsing a particular candidate. Gen. Maxon said that he had been able to speak to various groups in his career at DEMA so long as it is clear that you are speaking to issues within the scope of your mission and not politics.

Open Discussion / Call to the Public – Noel Benois said that many of the people in Apache Junction are veterans and he considers them to be “rural Arizonans.” He wanted the agency to consider placing a Veterans Benefits Counselor there, which also benefit Native American veterans.

Announcements – Sierra Vista has developed Unified Veterans Council to represent various local veterans service organizations. A major project for the group is the Cavalry Soldier Relocation Project to bury soldiers whose remains were discovered in Tucson.

Linda Fulkerson has not received the support she expected from the Arizona Psychologists Association. She had requested that local psychologists could donate 1 hour each in order to establish a volunteer counseling group to support veterans. She has committed to contacting independent therapist herself as a means of establishing such a group.

Open meeting law – Gary Fredricks requested that the Open Meeting Law be distributed to all the Commissioners. The training offered through the Governor's Board and Commissions was very valuable and he encouraged the new Commissioners to attend as soon as possible.

Adjournment – The Commissioners moved to dismiss the meeting at 12:32. The next regular meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on August 4, 2007 at the American Legion Post #6, located at 202 S. Pleasant St in Prescott AZ 86303.